

## ***Early Experiences Matter***

### **DEC Conference - Des Moines Iowa - March, 2015**

Presented by Judge Constance Cohen (Ret.)

#### **FACTS UNIQUE TO INFANTS AND TODDLERS IN THE CWS:**

Infants are the largest cohort of children entering care (20%)

Every seven minutes a child under the age of three is removed

Children under three remain in foster care longer

33% return to placement

81% of childhood fatalities occur in children under four

Developmental delays are 4-5 times greater than for children in the general population

More than 50% suffer from serious physical health problems

More than 50% suffer cognitive delays

Lower rate of reunification

***More than 80% suffer from prenatal exposure to drugs.***

#### **EARLY EXPERIENCES AND ENVIRONMENTS MATTER**

Pre-natal exposure to alcohol and other drugs

Brain research:

Plasticity allows brain to change / repair

Groundwork is critical in early years

Positive experiences are essential to healthy development

## **WHAT WORKS**

Developmentally appropriate parenting time: Each additional visit per week triples the odds of permanent reunification within one year.

Pre-removal Conferences

Parent Partners

Remain current on drug screen issues

Evidence-based early interventions (Early Access, Home Visiting, e.g.)

Problem-solving / therapeutic court

Zealous advocacy

Ensure access to Part C of the IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act), CAPTA (Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act), CVAD (Iowa Atty General's Crime Victims Assistance Division), and other entitlements; understand funding streams

Attachment assessments and parent/child interaction therapy

Cross training of community

Collaborate with medical, dental, therapeutic, law enforcement, education, and others

Seek non-traditional collaborators

Safety planning

Trauma Informed Care

Post-permanency support

Judicial oversight and leadership

Mine community for existing services; develop needed services

Prevention

Understand impact of ACES (Adverse Childhood Experiences)

Timely decision making

Concurrent planning

Evaluate reasonable efforts

Accountability

Apply state and federal laws (CAPTA requires states to have provisions and procedures to refer to early intervention services funded by Part C of IDEA and also requires health care providers to notify agency (DHS) of all infants affected by illegal substance abuse or withdrawal symptoms.)

Bring science to justice

Grow hope

***There is good in the worst of us and bad in the best of us. If I can't find the good, I ask myself, "What have I overlooked?"***